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OBSERVATIONS AT A RED-TAILED HAWK NEST

BY JAMES W. CARPENTER, PETER M. KEHDE, AND DAVID E. WATTS

ON THE AFTERNOON of 19 April 1969, about six miles south of Okeene, Blaine County, central Oklahoma, we observed a pair of Red-tailed Hawks (*Buteo jamaicensis*) circling over a stocky, wind-thrown eastern juniper (*Juniperus virginiana*) standing in an open field in an eroded, gypsum-capped area along the Cimarron River. The squealing of the hawks indicated that they were excited, so we walked closer and saw a large nest near the top of the tree. We decided to investigate.

The nest was 21 feet above the ground and five feet below the very top of the tree, supported by stout branches. It was fully two feet across and a foot



NEST OF RED-TAILED HAWK WITH YOUNG

Photographed 19 April 1969 by James W. Carpenter, six miles south of Okeene, Blaine County, central Oklahoma

high with an inner basin about five inches deep. It was made largely of coarse twigs. There were no feathers, down, or other soft materials in the lining. The three young, which were probably a little less than a week old, moved about clumsily. They showed no antagonism toward us. Each of them was covered with white down and each had a black bill and pinkish legs and feet. An adult Eastern Wood Rat (*Neotoma floridana*) was lying on the rim of the nest. One of the brood had obviously been nibbling at the carcass or had recently been fed, for its beak and facial down were blood-stained.

About four hours later we visited the nest again, finding a freshly caught Eastern Wood Rat, a freshly caught Hispid Cotton Rat (*Sigmodon hispidus*), and a partly eaten Eastern Wood Rat on the nest's rim, a little above the level of the young hawks.

The nest was exceptionally low. According to Sutton (1967, *Oklahoma Birds*, p. 102), the lowest Oklahoma nest thus far on record was about 25 feet up. Data on file at the University of Oklahoma Bird Range clearly indicate that most nests in Oklahoma are from 40 to 60 feet above ground. The hatching date is early: a nest found by D. F. Parmelee on 17 April 1954 on a cliff in Cimarron County still contained eggs; a nest found by L. E. Dunn and P. F. Nighswonger on 2 May 1958 in Roman Nose State Park, Blaine County, held two young chicks (Sutton, op. cit., p. 103).

The Red-tailed Hawk is an important bird of prey in Oklahoma. The species inhabits wooded parts of the state all year, though some birds that nest or are reared here probably move farther south in winter, being replaced by birds that nest or are reared north of Oklahoma. In rough country Red-tails often nest on cliffs as well as in trees in Oklahoma. They are uncommon in treeless parts of Oklahoma in winter. The accompanying photograph lends further evidence as to the importance and efficiency of the Red-tailed Hawk in the natural regulation of rodent populations.

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OKLAHOMA 74074. 5 JUNE 1969.

THE RED PHALAROPE IN OKLAHOMA

BY GEORGE MIKSCH SUTTON

THE RED PHALAROPE (*Phalaropus fulicarius*) is believed to be rare in the Southern Great Plains. Its migrations take place largely at sea. It has been taken six times in Kansas, five times in the fall (October 6 to December 5), once in spring (May 10), twice in the northeastern part of the state, four times at the Cheyenne Bottoms, in Barton County, about one hundred miles north of Woods County, Oklahoma (Sutton, 1967, *Oklahoma Birds*, p. 209). The only record that I know of for Texas is of a bird seen on 26 September 1893 in Wise County, about fifty miles south of Jefferson and Love counties, Oklahoma (Bent,

1927, *U. S. Natl. Mus. Bull.* 142, p. 15; Wolfe, 1956, *Check-list of the Birds of Texas*, p. 31; Sutton, *op. cit.*). For Oklahoma there has heretofore been only one record—that of a single bird in winter feather seen on 30 September 1962 along the southwest shore of Lake Hefner, in Oklahoma County, central Oklahoma by J. G. Newell, J. E. Martin, Irene Martin, *et al.* (1963, *Audubon Field Notes*, 17: 45; Sutton, *op. cit.*).

On 4 October 1968, Dr. Robert B. Payne, Louis Bussjaeger, Michael Aldinger, Clifford Blazer, Martha Ficklin, Keith Giezantner, Charles Keys, Dorothy (Mrs. W. C.) McGrew, James A. Tuck, and I happened upon a Red Phalarope in a long, narrow roadside pond just east of Boise City, Cimarron County, at the western end of the panhandle. This bird I collected (1969, *Audubon Field Notes*, 23: 76).

As we had driven westward from central Oklahoma that day, the weather had steadily worsened. When, in late afternoon, we reached Boise City, the sky was dark, wind from the northeast strong, and the drizzle raw. The only other shorebird we saw at the pond was a crippled Lesser Yellowlegs (*Totanus flavipes*). Nowhere along the 350-mile drive had we seen the Wilson's Phalarope (*Steganopus tricolor*), a species that is often locally abundant in Oklahoma during the season of migration.

When we first saw the Red Phalarope it was floating quietly a few feet out from the edge of the pond, sheltered from the wind by rank grass and other vegetation. The dark patch back of the eye, separate dark patch at the rear of the crown, and white wingbar indicated that it was not a Wilson's Phalarope. Since the Northern Phalarope (*Lobipes lobatus*) was known to be uncommon in Oklahoma, I sensed that the moot bird should be collected at once. When, on lifting the specimen from the water, we found that the bill was broad, we knew that we had a Red Phalarope—the first specimen of its species for the state.

Examination revealed that it was a young bird molting from juvenal into first winter feather. The entire bill was dark brownish gray, the base of the lower mandible being no more yellow than any other part. (Dr. David F. Parmelee informs me that in three fall specimens taken at the Cheyenne Bottoms in Kansas the base of the lower mandible was yellow.) The tarsi and tops of the toes in the Oklahoma specimen were pale bluish gray, the webbing and bottoms of the feet dull light yellow. The irides were very dark brown, almost black. On skinning the bird, I found it to be fairly fat. The stomach was virtually empty; the ovary small. All of the lesser and middle wing coverts and tertials, a few of the scapulars, and many feathers of the lower hind neck and upper back were juvenal—i.e., dark brownish gray, more or less edged with grayish white. The incoming winter plumage on the upper parts and on the sides of

the chest was clear light ashy gray. An ill-defined patch in the middle of the lower throat was light brownish buff.

There are only three species of phalarope. These do not differ much *inter se* when they are in winter plumage. Size difference is not great, though the Northern is the smallest and the Red the chunkiest of the three. The Northern and Wilson's are very slender-billed, the Red thick-billed by comparison, though the difference does not show up readily in the field. In both the Northern and the Red the broad white tipping of the greater secondary coverts forms a bold bar that is especially noticeable when the birds are flying. Wilson's has no such wing-bar. According to my experience, Wilson's is the most apt of the three to leave the water and to walk or run along the shore feeding with peeps and other shorebirds. When Wilson's does this, it can be downright confusing, for it does not look much like a phalarope with its trim body-shape, longish tarsi, etc.

I have just learned that on 18 October 1969 J. G. Newell and V. J. Vacin saw a Red Phalarope with a Northern Phalarope at the southwest corner of Lake Hefner. The following day Newell, Brad Carlton, *et al.* saw *two* Red Phalaropes and a Northern at the same place.

STOVALL MUSEUM OF SCIENCE AND HISTORY, UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA, NORMAN, OKLAHOMA 73069, 25 OCTOBER 1969.

GENERAL NOTES

A second Groove-billed Ani record for Oklahoma County, Oklahoma.—From early October to 11 November 1968 several persons observed a Groove-billed Ani (*Crotophaga sulcirostris*) from time to time near an oilfield testing equipment shop at 1700 S. E. Twenty-fifth Street in Oklahoma City (Newell, 1969, *Bull. Oklahoma Orn. Soc.*, 2: 1-2). On 20 July 1969, not far from the coffer dam just north of Lake Overholser, in an area about 11½ miles northwest of the above-mentioned shop, and close to the Oklahoma County line, I saw another Groove-billed Ani.

I was working slowly along the dam, observing shorebirds on the mudflats to the southward. An infrequently repeated, two-syllabled whistle, coming from a brushy area about 200 yards west of the end of the dam, attracted my attention. The singing of a Mockingbird (*Mimus polyglottos*) and calls from scattered groups of young Boat-tailed Grackles (*Cassidix mexicanus*) rather effectively submerged the strange call.

The ani finally flew from the brush following some grackles. Though it was about 100 yards away, moving out over the mudflat, I recognized it at once as an ani. It turned back shortly, alighting in a small "island" of bulrushes, where it continued to call infrequently from a conspicuous perch. I was able to approach to within about 75 yards and to observe it for about half an hour. Its manner of flight—a few wingbeats followed by a short glide—and the distinctive callnote convinced me beyond all doubt that it was a Groove-billed Ani. Since it was molting heavily, it had a dishevelled appearance. When I last saw it, it was moving downward into the shelter of the bulrushes.

This is the second Groove-billed Ani record for Oklahoma County and the seventh record for the state.—John G. Newell, 4129 North Everest, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73111, 11 August 1969.

A Screech Owl specimen from southeastern Oklahoma.—In his discussion of the subspecific status of the Screech Owl (*Otus asio*) in Oklahoma, Sutton (1967, *Oklahoma Birds*, p. 256) states that specimens from the southeastern portion of the state are "badly needed." In the collection of the late J. Stokely Ligon, now housed with the University of New Mexico Collection of Vertebrates, is a red phase Screech Owl specimen collected by him on 4 October 1919 4 mi. northeast of Page, LeFlore County, southeastern Oklahoma (UNMCV 1675). The bird is labelled as a female; its measurements are: wing 156 mm., tail 78, culmen from cere 12. Wing measurements are similar to those of females from Murray, Cleveland, and McClain counties. specimens that Sutton (*op. cit.*) believes are closest to *O. a. hasbroucki*.

Marshall (1967, *Mon. West. Found. Vert. Zool.*, 1: 1-72) provides the most recent discussion of geographic variation in screech owls. He states (*op. cit.*, p. 6) that females of *O. asio* average three per cent longer-winged than males. Using male values provided by Marshall as 100 per cent, I have calculated average wing-lengths of females of the three subspecies most likely to contribute genetically to *O. asio* populations in eastern Oklahoma. They are: 167, *O. a. asio* (p. 20); 166, *O. a. hasbroucki* (p. 19); and 145, *O. a. floridanus* (p. 21). Marshall suggests that the influence of *O. a. floridanus* is shown in Arkansas specimens by their small size: females average only 152 mm. in wing-length. In size, as expressed by wing-length, the Oklahoma specimen under consideration does not differ from females from the main body of Oklahoma, so influence of *O. a. floridanus* as shown by size is not apparent.

Species such as *Otus asio* are especially difficult to study taxonomically since they occur in many habitats over a large range. Their morphological characters exhibit a gradual change from one end of the range to the other, as a result of differences in selection pressures in different environments (Huxley, J., 1942, *Evolution: The Modern Synthesis*, p. 206). The term *cline* refers to this "gradual change" within a species. Because of the difficulties involved in taxonomic studies of clinally varying species, Owen (1963, *Systematic Zool.*, 12: 8-14) suggests that subspecific names be done away with altogether. Owen states that "most . . . subspecies have been erected by drawing arbitrary lines through clinal variation" (p. 8). Marshall (*op. cit.*, p. 6), though he does not follow Owen's drastic recommendation, limits the use of subspecific names to those populations that are "100% separable in color"; the races he recognizes are ". . . islands of unique traits developed to an extreme, set about in a vast sea of heterogeneous intergrades and intermediates." But authors recognize the taxonomic complexities presented by this species, as is well illustrated by the situation in most of Oklahoma (Sutton, *op. cit.*). It may be best to consider the LeFlore County specimen as representative of Marshall's "sea of . . . intergrades and intermediates." In any case, there is no evidence that *O. a. asio*, as most recently defined by Marshall (*op. cit.*), is found in southeastern Oklahoma (cf. Nice, 1931, *The Birds of Oklahoma*, p. 104).—J. David Ligon, Department of Biology, Museum of Southwestern Biology, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, New Mexico 87106, 23 May 1969.

Robin a victim of cowbird parasitism.—At about 1700 on the afternoon of 18 April 1969, on a lawn within the city limits of Shawnee, Pottawatomie County, central Oklahoma, I found the egg of a Robin (*Turdus migratorius*) with three pairs of small perforations in its shell. In a medium-sized ornamental pine whose base was about 10 ft. from the egg, I found a robin's nest containing two robin eggs and one egg of the Brown-headed Cowbird (*Molothrus ater*). The following morning at 0900 the nest again held two robin eggs and one cowbird egg. At dusk on the evening of 20 April I visited the nest but decided against disturbing the robin that was on it. On 25 and 27 April the nest held two robin eggs only. I do not know how or when the cowbird egg was removed.

The egg that I found on the ground almost certainly had been carried there by the cowbird. Since there were three pairs of perforations, we may assume that the cowbird had jabbed ineffectually at the egg at least twice with open bill before obtaining a firm grip. In Dayton, Ohio, a friend of B. J. Blincoe saw a female cowbird go to a robin nest, seize one of the robin eggs, and "fly to the ground, holding it in her mandibles." The egg "apparently . . . had been carried with mandibles separated considerably and driven deeply into the shell" (1935, *Wilson Bull.*, 47: 158).

H. Friedmann, who considered the robin "an uncommon victim" of the cowbird (1929, *The Cowbirds*, p. 258), subsequently stated that he knew "of only 26 records" of such parasitism (1963, *U. S. Natl. Mus. Bull.*, 233: 72). In Oklahoma the robin has not heretofore been recorded as a victim of the cowbird.—James R. Purdue, *Department of Zoology, University of Oklahoma, Norman, Oklahoma 73069, 4 May 1969.*

Spring specimen of Baird's Sparrow from northeastern New Mexico.—On 11 May 1968, in Union County, New Mexico, at a spot 3 mi. west and 1 mi. south of Kenton, Cimarron County, Oklahoma, I collected a male Baird's Sparrow (*Ammodramus bairdii*). The specimen (right testis 4 x 4 mm., left testis 4.5 x 2.5) weighed 20.4 grams, was very fat, and showed no molt. It has been deposited in the Museum of Southwestern Biology at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, where it bears the number 3271.

The bird was taken in a pasture throughout which most of the vegetation had been cropped to within an inch of the ground, but where scattered isles of grass 4 to 6 in. high remained. I first flushed the sparrow from an isle of higher grass and pursued it for some time before obtaining it. On each of several flushes it flitted a few yards and alighted in the isle of grass from which it had flown, or flew some distance out over the short grass and alighted in another isle of higher grass. Horned Larks (*Eremophila alpestris*) were breeding in considerable numbers in the pasture, but the grass was probably too short for Western Meadowlarks (*Sturnella neglecta*), many of which inhabited nearby areas having higher grass and scattered yucca and cholla. No other fringillid seemed to be inhabiting the pasture in which I found the Baird's Sparrow; but in pastures with higher grass I saw several Grasshopper Sparrows (*Ammodramus savannarum*) as well as mixed flocks composed of Chipping Sparrows (*Spizella passerina*), Clay-colored Sparrows (*S. pallida*), and Brewer's Sparrows (*S. breweri*).

I know of only one other acceptable spring record for the Baird's Sparrow in New Mexico—that of four birds taken along the Gila River in the south-

western corner of the state on 28 April 1913 (Ligon, 1961, *New Mexico Birds*, p. 289). My specimen was taken only a mile from the Oklahoma state line. The one specimen known to have been collected in Oklahoma was taken on 23 April 1953 in the central part of the state (Sutton, 1967, *Oklahoma Birds*, p. 608). The fact that several Baird's Sparrows have been taken on the plains adjoining the eastern slope of the Rockies in central and northern Colorado (Bailey and Niedrach, 1965, *Birds of Colorado*, 2: 804) indicates that the species migrates to some extent along the western edge of the Southern Great Plains; but Baird's Sparrow has also been taken well eastward in Texas, Oklahoma, and Kansas, and scarcity of specimens from the central part of the plains may reflect irregularity of field work and paucity of observers rather than scarcity of birds.—Sievert A. Rohwer, *Museum of Natural History, University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas 66044, 5 May 1969.*

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